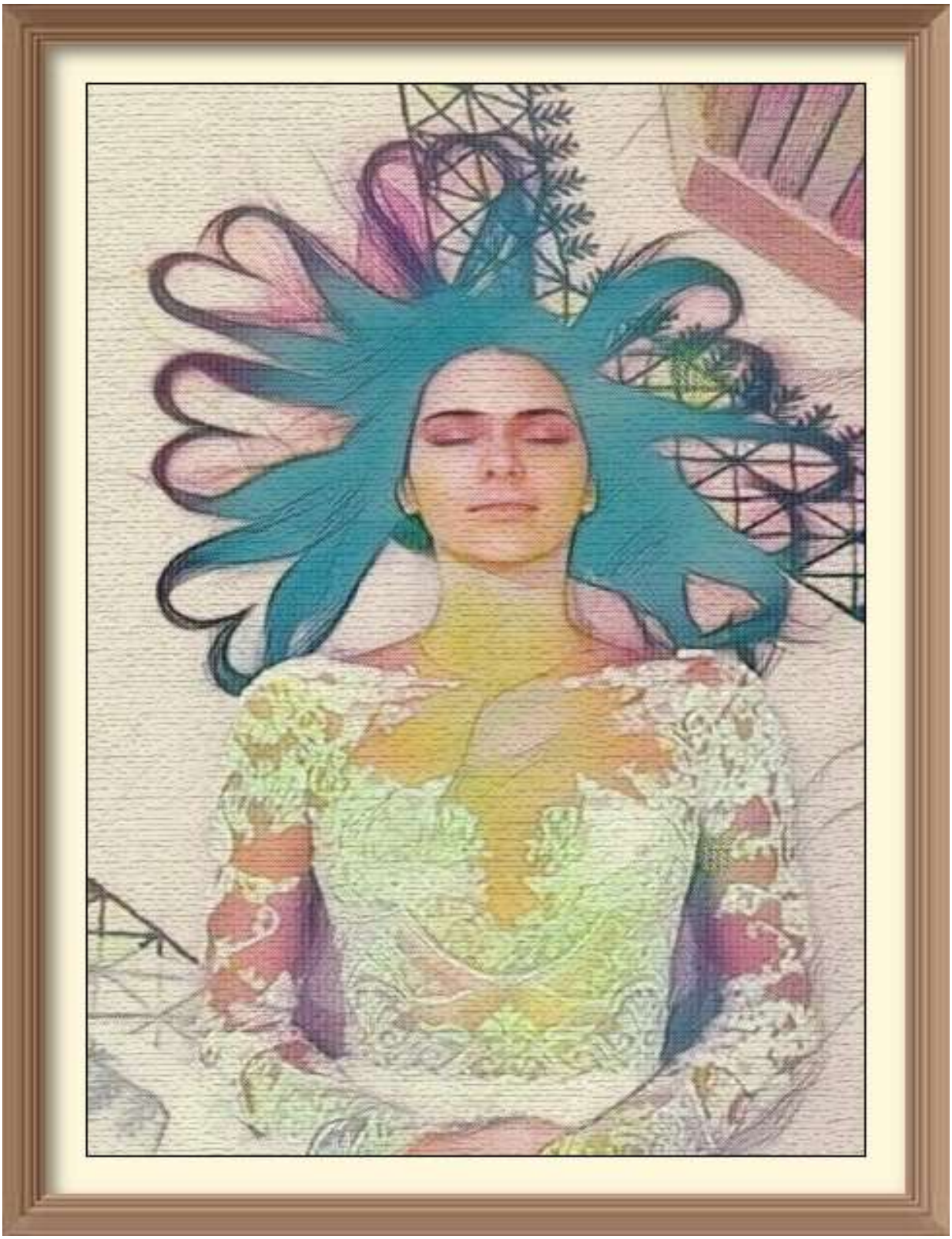
ADAM FIELED CURIOSITIES



Curiosities

Adam Fieled

Curiosities

I. Major Odes

Ode: On Exile

No bells strike at Saint Matthew's; midnight
means lights out; across Fayette Street, windows
send slow signals; but for hope of daylight,
no means of evoking, painted or not, halos.
Occasional cars; the 7-11 parking lot empties
not completely, the night crew forced to spill
laced coffee, pills, down throats, past painted
faces reflecting gloom, as they plan candies
passed around to kill behind, enemies
locked in basements, unwilling dross killed.

Dull, dense, reptile-laden world— nature's phantom
side, scarred with imperatives to destroy— I
stride past Calvary Episcopal, its handsome,
enchanted spires, trying to forge a "who" and "why."
Caravaggio's John the Baptist, crouched darkly
in murk, I superimpose on Conshohocken at
night, including the succession into severed head—
knowing that in there (7-11), warnings sharply
uttered mean nothing, less than nothing at that,
humanity is lost, then its corpse is bled.

This is not the world I was born for— Butler
Pike, a Honda pulls into the abandoned
Dairy Queen lot, the young male driver scuttles
out into the apartment complex, fear-flattened—
as to what John Milton would say about these
suburban straits, everyone changing form
like Satan, a poet singed by lost innocence
up all night on his own pills, thoughts, caffeine—
I divine he knew all this, putrid fires warmed
to kill brains, rigid rules passed on, idiot to idiot.

On the Schuylkill

Borne by the river's back, boat-legions rolled
in search of commerce, bridges to build;
souls, cargo (heavy, light), bought and sold,
coffers waiting in Philly to be filled.
Ladies leaped gingerly onto green banks,
bound in satin or lace, versed in politesse or no,
and walked rote patterns, inscribed insignias in the air;
crew-ship kids, underlings already in their ranks,
sought to make the landing show-offy, slow,
hulked a hundred yards from a drunken fair.

Add a century, an Expressway looms over
the murk— wave-sounds, squeals, and metal—
which the Schuylkill cannot answer, hovering
under— slow-moving, patient, and settled.
The river's mind is limpid— the human race
churns around it restlessly, adding bodies
shorn of dignity, bloated, pulp-bloody, blue,
having carried burdens the river never dreams
of, emptiness so incorrigible the Schuylkill's face
registers nothing but disinterested waves— tender, true.

The Over-brain, peering in, questioning, elevates
the Schuylkill's mystery into frozen heat—
truth and beauty buoyed up in the browning, decay, fate
of all water-bodies prone to human meat—
I sit on the edge, watching overhanging leaves,
frozen myself by the gross negligence
of what lies beneath the river's surface,
and my own, as the summer sun inverts, grieves,
for the masses, exploring no penitence
as I am, grounded, here, and diving for purpose—

Ode On Waves

Raw December chill: I stood, smoking, outside
  Starbucks, staring through the pane façade
at a brunette teenager, fine-featured, who looked like
  me, bent over a history book; moody, pawed
at by circumstances past her control. I thought of
  State College, my sublets, also a buried past,
attempts at being a consummate artist, and at love.
  The tapestry around my brain being woven
showed a vignette, disappearing into exiled years,
  someone of my kith and kin, damned not to last—

acclaimed as useless. When I'd walk Conshy streets,
  I was always, without knowing it, looking for her.
If it was Manayunk, I'd put on the old shirts, sleeves
  still unstained by years of heavy use, eyes stirred
by possibility. Or Center City, shady ghost-like incisions
  of the old Aughts scenester crew, now vacant,
derelict, all guesses at identity lost, open to revision—
  in another paned façade, summer's day, reflections
of poison in the air, the iced coffee (even), the toilets,
  waves against all we'd held together here breaking—

and, as one who ages must know, why waves have to break.
  Natural human progression: everything covered up.
Natural human predilection: to bolster everything fake;
  and yet if you can fight the masses, the rackets, with guts,
you are inscribing the light of heaven into willing granite,
  from the haunted, furrowed brows of the doomed
who deserved better, to the idle buzzers whose vanity
  filled the galleries, clubs, coffee shops, with human
energy, a sense of hipness, rightness, in earlier times,
  so that your life still holds the unity of one heart, one room.

There's what you can make right, what you can't, lots of
  grey area around, sort of, maybe, "I'll find out later,"
attempts at what you think, inebriated, enflamed, is love,
  what gets produced beyond your control, faked or fated.
So I stood there, saw her through that pane, Whitemarsh
  Shopping Center moving heedlessly, cheaply, around us,
and she was more real than a Grecian Urn, or Shelley's skylark,
  I could've run away, she might've, torn the frozen panic
of what it meant, but didn't: and this, later, is what I can give her, lines,
  whatever else doesn't matter, this is the wave for the two of us.

To March

Tremulous time— rain-laden flowers
threatening to burst forth— sodden
branches quiver. Exhalations still
visible, people linger in watery streets,
hydroplaning tires glisten.

Blue patches line the sky—
droplets engorge terraces— cups
of coffee, especially poignant for
winter-weary souls in still cafes.

Nature at the end begins to forge
invisible buds— suppressed grass
dreams succulence. Clouds shroud
puddles. Lengthening days.

A correspondence exists in me
for this— hovering on fertility's edges,
writing to find the entire note,
the perfect kiss, moments of grace after
longing, fighting. Every cloud echoes
my reaching. Wanderlust for forgotten forms,

skies abandoned by vapors fixed
to the earth. My mind is hung with sun
flowers springing, lands uncreated,
dim, unpupil'd eyes, needing deeper

roots for a sturdier birth. A trumpet call—
thought processions— friends, loves.
Hands molding, fretfully, with nascent
skill, permanent tapestries. Mud below,

shadows above. Planted seeds poised—
movement, chasms filled. Words
on a wing, where are they? Could I be
writing them now, this normal day, over

cigarettes, George Eliot, coffee, sadness?
Before the bud erupts, it issues a sigh for
the effort, like of priests or of lovers—
crafting the genuine, born out of gladness.

Ode On Jazz

Physical beauty, Formal Rigor of God—
spiritual beauty, Economy of God—
Natural Will, Transcendent Will,
Facile Will in all its' dismal "there-ness"—

Piano broken chords breaking down space
like watching bits of paper collect,
contained in a 12-bar blues; root
notes you tend to lean on,
or maybe a honking minor third,
a harmonic multi-colored sharp…

Follow your compulsion into flurries,
clusters of connecting phrases,
then a pause to sanctify as the progression
resolves after lingering on the fifth
for the appointed time—
pentatonics mainly with some suspensions,
sheets of sound, there it is, trademark leaps,
like watching a rainbow erupt
out of the placid bowels of street-lakes,
sparrows in the gutters,
Eliot-esque alienation syncopated
impossibly high and mighty…

Repeat the repetition now into major scale—
Ionian gold, major-third suspensions again,
almost midnight for tremulous trees,
also hipsters, flights of birds, rabbis
in the wilderness as blues ends; here's a quicker
quirkier jarring bit to cut
your teeth on…

Base bottom notes natural like ferns,
ride the ride cymbal like musical fellatio,
roll with rolls and kick-drum ejaculations,
what Hart Crane heard in bridges,
only blues (so bridge seldom comes),
stasis achieved nicely replicates movements,
bowel, kidney, heart-beat, daring snare of lip-ness,
thickness, quickness,
get it all out for all of us into the brick-laden city,
mutter of exhausted midnight buses
as vibrato notes shiver, miniature

solos on the toms creates energy
of emptiness among the weird abundance,
concluding with roll on the snare, now bass
also investigates metaphysical space,
not so much implacable as inexhaustible
eruptions; spring of autumn,
autumn of spring…

Seasons of balance, compromise,
away from extremes; Middle Path exteriorized,
oh piano on a minor seventh which bespeaks
longing for a more ethereal world,
elegiac as the last apple of October, eaten
by a Halloween camp-fire, beyond blues
of Earth into cadence, dying fall of pure moon,
ravaged, torn from the throat of persistence,
mute existence destroyed completely
and on fire, a universe of fingers and mouths,
looking down the tide of Death into eternity,
square-shouldered and erect,
freezing into whims of Ultimate "there-ness",
beyond ordinary notions of quotidian abyss
in one long sitting pow-wow peace-pipe corn-cob
wholesome dinner of Voidness,
but insinuated only to drive away singularity….

Jazz is plural,
they give you a space, show you its' contours,
allow you to move around and drown
if you want over hilltops of remorse, created
by Love or dolorous longing and especially
Central Parks of the soul and intellectual Bordello
life cut and pasting its' bleak outline over rooftops
and bluebirds—

On Love

What tide is the realest, which pulls in a kiss?
    The rigor of reaching the thing-in-itself,
from subject to object, chaos to bliss,
    our frail intuition of heavenly health?
Our love is not molecules, dumbly colliding,
    nor is it knowledge, formal and static,
        nor is it accident, reasoned and plumbed—
it's real, meta-rational, soaring and gliding,
    felt like an earthquake, bringing up panic,
        taking our parts and achieving a sum.

The greater part of love is sacrifice—
    flesh intermingled, tensing (push!) tingled,
this is the secret I learn from your eyes.
    Giving my body, knotted, single,
tiny eruptions that come from my tongue;
    plunging down surfaces, slicking the flesh,
        thoughtless as leopards or hurricane winds—
watching you shudder, watching you come,
    rapt in the throes of an innocent death,
        giving my life to an inch of your skin.

Thus, we trade in secure oblivion
    for reckless reality, messy and fleeting.
Such is the cosmos— creation, carrion,
    motions of molecules merging and meeting.
Nothing is lost but notions of self-ness,
    hard ideations that close and clatter,
        rages of ego that strain at their walls—
nothing is gained but a sense of the deathless,
    "there-ness" of spirit, "there-ness" of matter,
        ultimate "there-ness" that scares as it calls.

To Satan

Let it not be said that his rhetoric drifts
  out of focus on Earth for a casual minute—
nor that just retribution is not terribly swift
  for those who disrespect his intimate business;
as the new mother, tethered away from her child,
  meths up, eats what she doesn't want
    to mortify dread that she might be other
than a perfect Satan's gofer, brainwashed, wild—
  infanticide-schemes, inversion-taunts,
    floorboards arranged under carpets, defiled.

Pentagrams engraved on truth's justice-seats,
  masks woven wanly of paint-wearing flesh;
abattoirs littered with poison-dwarf sweets,
  histories chopped out for infants, near death;
what are they scripting of filth, for what?
  That all the false idols, set in a line, might dance
    tangled, backwards, to all that's called dread?
How is he drifting? He's straight, he's shut
  against any heart holds a heavenly chance
    of imposing their visions, getting saintly in bed.

You're a ruddy old Big Man Downstairs, you,
  fibs so jejune I can't hear but to laugh—
your buttons are pinned upon somebody who
  mistook all your fame for a fortunate path.
Why governments swoon before truth is clear—
  you set the bar too high, and low at once,
    no clumsy-mouthed cleric can face all the dumbness—
why all of these drones from downstairs, not here,
  can't spit out a lick out of being a dunce,
    define for the ages what being a bum is.

To Bruce Nauman

The Mister who goes beyond recognition
of clichés of iron-bound self-hood
regenerating new notions that clank
mad paint onto our being, beating at
the doors of universities like Genet a thief
but a marijuana consciousness of absurdity
epitomizing West Coast anti-notions walking around the perimeters of art definitions
in a ten-gallon hat, with mescal on tap,
and breeding horses to boot, boots jangling
among the mind's fatal mood clowns, with
hard-ons to be bent over, so wicked into
the art-world that will not recover
from earnest strangeness made concrete,
creating new forms like something else,
a convention of Jehovahs Witnesses,
better yet the troupe of players that caught
the conscience of Claudius doing Beckett,
Nauman playing Pozzo, Picasso's ashes set
onstage in place of Vladimir and Estragon,
while Lucky gets to be Jasper Johns or
something, concluding that to make up is
to fall down, to fall down is to take form,
to take form is to become a fountain,
and some fountains are worth making—

See him square the circle in white shirt
as the day rages blankly outside, too tired
of its ephemeral heart to even conclude
immediately, squares of seasons apt to linger,
then emptiness, as though this funny project
were a mandala of Buddha, to prove that life
is not a circle, but rather sharp definite
edges, with many clusters of shoddy wood between
loaves of stale craving-bread, one shoulder
raised higher than other, bare feet slow
but mad as Nijinsky, make it a ritual
to feed soul's need not for religion itself
but for the feeling of religion, the joy of
being bounded, picture itself presented as
square, tiny in a little book I ordered
two years ago in a fit of delirium, now
I've propped it up like a collapsible urn of
ashes of dead heroes, only the captain
sits with horses watching the wheels of

temporal anti-tenderness spin, conventional
concepts raised up then razed, as in r-a-z-e-d,
does he still have the black pants I wonder?
Maybe he's just a ghost or an astral spirit,
somebody's Ariel—

Simple, strategic, rolling around on the floor,
looking into the camera's un-droll eye with
hyper-droll drollness, essence of droll but
somehow twisted beyond mere Dada ha-ha
into indeterminate snickers of profound weirdness
that will eventually beget a sullen fame,
spreading but not reaching cactus-y wilderness
where in summertime the living, I guess, is easy,
at least more so than playing with your balls,
not that the minimal has no weight but
that such weight leaves no room for developments
of a righteously figurative nature unless
one has sophisticated intellectual equipment
which, of course, he does—

II. Ballads

The Ballad of Robert Johnson

Mojo unhinged, he tumbles in black—
voice on a skewer, blood-flow gone slack.
He slept with a girl behind somebody's back.

Her body a car, she drove through the door—
bed like a highway, sheets on the floor.
He came into something he never went for.

The man on the porch was blacker than jet—
mottled in whiskey, bitter and wet.
He offered the flask with a little regret.

Chills in Rob's chest knew something was wrong—
juice was too sharp, its' tang was too strong—
mud in his guts like an unfinished song.

Collapsed on the road, hellhounds close in—
nothing but maggots crawl under his skin.
All for a lover he never could win.

Legends arose when he lay in the ground—
at midnight, the crossroads, shadows abound,
he waits with the Devil but can't make a sound.

Yet Robert's still singing, and never can go—
he's hotter than asphalt, colder than snow.
His knowledge of evil bewitches and glows.

The crossroads are here, the Devil is rife—
with each one we love, we give up our life.
Remember poor Robert when you take a wife.

Wayfaring Angel

Visions of jungle, elephants doze;
  tigers are slumberous, spiders repose
before any human can frighten their nose.

She's on a bender, peyote and grass;
  spirits defend her, karma amassed;
astonishing yogis, the head of her class.

The temple was gold, ceiling a dome;
  hid in the hills, she found me alone;
a wayfaring straggler, rough skin and bone.

Struggle like death, hours went on;
  run out of breath, night into dawn;
entwined in a web— consummation— then gone.

She was still high, I watched her evoke
  Gods of the jungle, deities spoke
exhorting this princess, before she awoke

to lead me to reason, why she was here;
  guide me past shyness, chide me past fear;
bedraggle not ever what must be made clear.

How I was chosen, she tried to explain;
  clipped not by coyness, confusion, or pain;
yet all I could see was her flesh in my brain—

solid like marble, snow-white and smooth,
  I placed my hands on, couldn't remove
while she dealt the dharma, was peaking to prove

that now she'd achieved this peak of her dream;
  now what was woven wouldn't show seams;
the Wayfaring Angel I'd been was her means.

III. Lyric Poems

A Match

The loft-like flat with the cavernous
roof was in South Philly, well-heated
but polluted, dusted, with detritus,
she was what Los Angeles was in spite
of these things, sunken wastelands, sheeted

lightning making the stage all but emptiness.
As he fell into her, he fell into resistance,
petulance, snobbishness, yet also wetness—
she could do it, out of sublime forgetfulness,
big-titted, posing for spies, cameras her witness.

Los Angeles then lay in his arms like luggage.
What was in her were carnival masks, face-paint—
greasy, lumpy, churned from blood gone sluggish.
She was his palm-tree baggage, dumb, doggish.
He felt himself bitter, ransacked, naked, wasted.

Their child sails brackish seas somewhere, twisted.
Los Angeles just died, still convulsive, of disease
not acknowledged, or processed, number unlisted.
L.A. and her were queen for a day, then got fisted.
He moves on in Philly, no sprain in his knees.

Through the party in a dark, dreary mansion

Through the party in a dark, dreary mansion,
   I chased her up the slick wooden stairs—
goblins repulsing our pouting and passion,
   ghouls in a hurry to stifle our dares—
blue, spare bedroom in a spasm of anguish,
   her clothes came off like rain-fattened mud—
both in a hurry, before we both languish,
   Cheltenham sucking the life from our blood—

how can I say this is where I've settled,
   trying to capture the pain of my youth—
fever and fear and despair in a kettle,
   diamonds on parasites, burying truth—
poetry lives past the sky's limpid ceiling,
   frequencies caught for a moment, & hung—
Cheltenham lived in a dungeon of feeling,
   which I've made eternal, like Stacy's quick tongue—

Godspell & Musical Theater

If you search for the lurid, the macabre,
in human life, you might be shown visions:
ragamuffins in dusty courtyards, decisions
eluding their minds, and to them what's given
is to run in circles and drop, follow a mob—

watching might spook your heart, dumb Everest
to hear, as though they could crawl beneath
your skin, chicanery-veined, lies settled deep
in their brains, worshipping clowns, steep
plunges waiting for them too, paltriness—

day by day, they're possessed by a shrill
sense that their Master must know something,
yet God knows what he knows, near-nothing,
and song is always crepuscular, desolate, dusty
where they croon past the courtyard, uphill—

up to coffins, to be drowned in like salmon.
I see the thing decades later, practiced voices,
limber actions, lines played for laughs, choices
made to stay dumb in the world, tuneful noises
made to express the star-crossed, black backgammon—

and yet parts of it remain cute, dashing, winsome,
if you can just stay on the surface, forget the grisly
reality beneath, forget the emptiness of misery
behind the whole thing, live in the pink mystery
of permanent musical glossiness, blank, fulsome—

To Jenny

Shuffled into an order, shut down, shuttled
into rooms, tiny or cavernous, left befuddled
at how random the show is (as you know, it is
a show, nothing behind it), but still your wits
may get you through it, the deals, bargains, work
pushing pieces around, under two feet of murk—

now all this, world you see before you, of a city
beleaguered in uncertain years— physically flinty,
empty streets, bars, parks, stores, arrays displayed,
wares no longer needed, blouses, dresses, weighed
against investments more to the point: food, paint,
and City Hall never changes: both sublime and quaint.

You want it to be a stage: fit for a Mummer's Parade.
You place the tiara on your head. Your eyes give shade.
They are good, your eyes, you picked them up somewhere.
The shock of Rittenhouse Square: people know you there.
What's in your mind is that you are waiting: where's the cue?
The footlights make a haze. You're clear, sharp, see through.

The irresolute point of this is: I know not where it's going,
either. Phoenix bird from ashes, Gabriel's horn blowing,
I can't see the telos, how you can own the stage rightly.
I only see the tension build, build, bleeding you nightly.
I learned how to stage manage a long time ago, learned
how to set stages generally. I'll wait to see what part you've earned.

Wittgenstein's Song

Merely brilliant is no match
for being intimate. When you catch
a wave that breaks, you can only
half-determine its' course. Lonely
is the determined man, whether
it's he who decides his fate or fetters
the world lays on him. This
I learned from a young man's kiss.
Thus, I've learned, said nothing.
To be silent is something
for the wise to practice. Words
go too far. How much have we heard
worth holding onto? How much said
that can placate what we dread?

IV. New Visions: Prose

#26

Our lives are conditioned by contingent factors, small and large, which shape and consolidate our perceptions. To make a long story short, how we perceive is conditioned heavily by what we have already perceived. Everyone's "spots of time" are peculiarly suited or unsuited to their own individual identity. I remembered something, when I encountered Wordsworth as an adult, that I knew would make sense to him as a tiny increment of time which made a large impression on my mind. The wooden cabin was rustic, realistically built, and cramped, especially to hold nine kids and two adults. Thus was formed the backbone of life at sleepaway camp. By the early morning hours, the two adult counselors had returned to their places and were also asleep. I awoke at maybe 2 in the morning one morning, from my position straight back and to the right, top bunk, to see a man standing stock still in the doorway of the cabin. The cabin's door was entirely open. There was nothing to light the man's face— his head was a well-outlined but nonetheless indistinct black blob. In the state I had of being half-asleep, I did not experience the impression of him, including black outlines, as a sinister one, but rather a vision of madness— of consciousness severed from reality, set adrift from the tactile in a land of amorphous shapes and sounds. The frozen man, swimming in the web of black shadows, was mad. Comforted, I fell back into complete sleep, which remained uninterrupted. The next day, I conveyed to others in the cabin what I had seen, but no one but me had been up for it. I was never able to solve the mystery of who the man was. Yet when I flash on the precise spot of time— a drowsy, half-asleep twelve-year-old at sleepaway camp sees, alone, something odd happen in the middle of the night— it is specifically about the odd things that people see, or the odd sights which are on offer among the human race when no one is, or seems to be, watching. The privacy of the vision— the contingency of the unlit face, seen indistinctly as a blob— more importantly, the mystery of whether the lunatic could notice from where he was standing that my eyes alone were, in fact, half-open— the perceived unpredictability of the lunatic's consciousness (why us? why this cabin?)— how preternaturally still he was— are all conflated with the sense that the vision is about all that happens in human life, hidden from view, which is most of it. We are forced to reckon an insubstantial surface most of the time. Beneath that surface, what is most real about the human race does its dance, which has much to do with madness, the middle of the night, and stillness intermixed with motion, as it did here.

#21

For a long time there was no sound that was my sound. Then one night, I was at my father's house, which was not Old Farm Road. Glenside, this Glenside, was posh, luxuriant. On the radio I heard a sound that I knew instinctively was my sound. It was resonant, sharp, and had echo; it sent reverberations out to the four corners of the earth; it would not be denied. The music began with a short phrase, a riff, played on a hugely fuzzed electric guitar. The riff, allowed to reverberate and fill a large, studio-generated aural landscape, was a thunderbolt shot down from Olympus. It tugged, as baseball did, at everything in me which was masculine, courageous, outrageous even, daring. When a human voice was heard, filtered in, intoning a harsh reprieve to an errant muse (*You need coolin', baby I'm not foolin'*), it could be heard as vibrantly raw or merely shrill, singing in a very high register. My own consciousness perceived nothing but the vibrancy of power: extreme, uncompromising volatility and nerviness. The drums filled out an expansively drawn landscape with even more authority, as though a tribunal of Greek gods had converged and were sending secret messages to me in Glenside, ensconced with headphones while my father watched TV impassively across the room. When the guitar spoke for itself, above the fray and accented by space made for it, it was a form of blues made sophisticated beyond blues I was familiar with: all the agony and bravado of blues guitar pushed into a space where more eloquence was required, to achieve a necessary release past overwhelming tension. The cascades of notes were not just a release: they were a hint and a missive sent to me about the possibility of ecstasy on earth, achieved nirvana, release from karmic wheels. The aural landscape was rocky, mountainous, and allowed the listener to climb from peak to peak with it. In short, it was a place I'd never seen, a miraculous place, with landslides clanging over other landslides so that no stasis or silence need be tolerated. I had to merge with the landscape, join it, become it. I would not be able to sit still unless I became one with this sound, until I could similarly reverberate. I needed to reach the four corners, the mountain peaks, along with it. This sound that began with a loud guitar, played hotly, showed me the world seen through an auditory prism of light and shade.

#33

I liked the festive aspect of celebrations, and the little adventures one could set loose at a party: running wild, smashing things, drinking forbidden alcohol. Driven by a delirious continuance, I put my hands all over girls' bodies. I prodded, pinched, teased, respectful yet prolonging the experience any way I could. My will dovetailed with a wonted continuance and I was precocious: jacket off, tie loosened, a little wolf. I learned how to ride a high and how to direct cohesive energy into a palpable magnetic force. At a festivity on the top of a Center City skyscraper in April '89, on an immense rectangular outdoor porch bordered by chest-high railings, I looked down to see, a great distance beneath me, an empty street, what I would later know as Sansom Street. I was talking to a momentary companion about my philosophy of life as not a game of chance but a game of daring. "Look," I told her, "watch." I took a wineglass I'd stolen while the adults in the indoor festivity area adjacent were not watching, and heaved it over the railing. She rolled her eyes, but, as I could not help but notice, I got away with it. Wherever the glass had crashed, and the resultant shards, were invisible to my eyes. Nothing happened. I wouldn't be henceforth carted off to reform school. I had been daring, riding on my luck, and I succeeded. Just as, at a birthday party at the Greenwood Grille, I snuck another wineglass out of the restaurant into the tunnel connecting one side of the Jenkintown Septa station to the other, and smashed it down in some kind of compactor unit. But on the top of the skyscraper, looking out over the baroque, well-balanced Philly sky-line, a seed had been planted which I hadn't noticed. What the city was, in contrast to the suburbs, was as invisible to me as the rogue glass-shards then. I was destined to learn that a spirit of adventure was one thing in the 'burbs, but could be pushed out and developed much further in the city, where crowds of interesting people could always mean interesting action. As we turned back into the main festivity area to shake off the April evening chill, I had a calm sense of being in tune with the cosmos. I picked up a spare Kahlua, and drank it.

#47

Winter stars twinkled above another Recreation Center in Elkins Park. I had walked out of the party, dejected, deflated by too many ups and downs, social snafus. N had seen me making a blatant pass at someone else. Yet N and I were by no means officially an item. N was swinging on the swing set; I joined her. I wanted to commiserate with her at how superficial the whole thing was— people wearing masks, playing roles, no one being real with anyone else. I wanted to recalibrate my entire consciousness around N, and the state of sacred union, of oneness, we often achieved. I was unaware that N had seen the pass being made, not botched but only half-accepted. And, to her, a betrayal, of the sense of oneness we had together when we did our phone benders. N was always betrayed by the physical. So, she swung, under the eerie yellow-orange outside lights, weak against all the encroaching darkness, the parking lot and the stars. I noticed: she wasn't answering me the right way. I said, "Don't you think this party is…", and she cut in "no, I don't. I'm going back inside," leaving me to swing by myself. When I followed her in, in a few minutes, it was with the hollowed-out sense of having been broken, having seen oneness cut in half. There was the horror of it. The large, cavernous reception area led to several equally large, cavernous room spaces, empty, dark, and forbidding at this time of night, where I decided to spend a few minutes regrouping. Through an open door, I watched N make her usual party rounds. My date for the night was sequestered in one spot, and hadn't moved. I wanted to be somewhere else. Yet the demands of the evening required that I emerge and begin to do my own rounds. So, getting up my gets, I shut the door behind me (to all that wilderness) and walked straight over to the piano, where a bunch of random kids were huddled. The tunes I plonked out were simple ones, and I didn't sing along. I shyly approached my date and was evenly accepted. She had no heaviness for me the way N did, who would not speak to me for the rest of the night. But she liked her own body and the power it gave her. I myself should not, perhaps, have been a prisoner of the physical, but I was. I desired women physically in a way I could not hide. I wanted a shared oneness which was all-consuming. And my soul could only wish that there, under those stars, with light traffic rolling by on Old York Road, I could take N to the place where she might want what I wanted, and we could be all-consuming with each other, and nothing in us, physical or otherwise, could be anything but joined forever.

#52

The weekend nights we went ice skating at the Old York Road Ice Skating Rink, semi-adjacent to Elkins Park Square, also on Old York Road, weren't much for Ted and I: just something to do. Neither of us could ice skate that much. But there was a DJ playing good music over the PA, and taking requests, and a lot of Cheltenham kids hung out at the rink on weekends, so it was a chance to see and be seen. One uneventful ice skating night, I tumbled onto my ass as usual, and rose to see a girl, sitting in a clump of kids, on the bleachers, staring fixedly at me. My next pass, I got in a good look at her, and saw the spell was holding: she was still staring. She was a dirty blonde, thick-set build, with very full lips, a wide mouth, and wearing a dark green winter hat. I made up my mind: my next pass, I was going to stare as fixedly at her as she was at me. Ted was floating in the environs somewhere, and didn't know what was going on. So, here I came, looking at the girl in the green winter hat I'd never seen before, who seemed to want a piece of my action. I was close enough to make my presence known to her; we locked eyes; and what I saw in the delicate blue eyes was a sense of being startled, shocked into awareness somehow. Only, there was something so raw, so frank in them that I had to look away. My next, and final pass for the time being, the same thing happened. My eyes were startled, in an animal way, by how startled, how riveted her own eyes were, and I found myself unable to prolong contact. As Ted and I hung in the changing room, which had picnic tables and benches in it and doubled as a hang out space, I relayed to Ted, not without pride, what had happened. Ted was a reasonable, rather than a jealous type, but shy. So, the mysterious dirty blonde sat with her friends still, unmolested by us. Edward, our close acquaintance, a year older than us but kind, and conversant with almost everyone at the rink, was someone I could consult, so I did. I pointed her out, and he said, "Oh, that's Nicole. Do you know her?" "No, I was just curious. Thanks, Eddie." He chuckled, and left us alone, close acquaintanceship not guaranteeing me any more than that. I had wild hopes that Nicole would burst dramatically into the hang-out room with her friends, and perhaps propose marriage to me. When the gaggle of kids including Nicole, who had all been bleacher-hounding, left, they walked past us, down the steps and out. Nicole did not venture a final glance. For several months after that, I hoped Ted and I would see Nicole at the rink, but we did not. It was a lesson in the live-wire nature of desire, as it lives between people— how flames both begin to burn and are extinguished, out of nowhere, at the behest of forces no one really understands. Ted, that night, did his rounds, building a solid structure which would enable him to become a popular kid at CHS. I lit somebody on fire, but in such a way that all that could come from it was subsumed beneath implacable surfaces. Somewhere, I felt instinctively, was the key to the mystery I was looking for. Even if finding that key meant riding confusing, misleading, and/or agonizing waves.

#53

What the matrix structure of the Old York Road Ice Skating Rink held for us kiddies— as has been said, a place to see and be seen. Ted and I were sad to watch on the ice. But quirks emerged during our time there— the appearance of strange kids, and strange situations, from other places. Like Nicole. It wasn't long after Nicole that a new, mini-epoch began at the rink, based on the manifestation of another figurehead, (they said) from Abington. Josie was a pretty, lank-haired blonde with a semi-mottled complexion. Like Nicole, she liked to sit on the bleachers with her Abington buddies. Word reached us that, unlike Nicole, Josie was loose. If you could get her down the stairs, into the parking lot, over past the big misshapen rock which was rather uselessly placed between the rink and the back of Elkins Park Square, into the no-man's-land area where older kids liked to hang, anything might happen. I wanted a shot at Josie, too. As was de rigueur, Edward was our go-between. I had faith that he could power-broker anything. I called to him, on a night in March getting slightly too warm to still be at the rink, "Eddie, can I talk to you for a minute?" "What's up, Foley?" "Is this thing about that Josie girl from Abington really true?" "I don't know. I don't know her that well." "You know what people are saying." "Sure I do, but there's nothing too definite about what I've been told." I was losing him. I had already semi-crossed a line Edward had set in place about what you (whoever you were, and however he ranked you) were allowed to extort, as precious data, from him. I had to act fast. "I want to meet Josie, Eddie. Can you help me?" "C'mon, Foley. That stuff doesn't come cheap. Remember, I don't know you too well, either." Next gambit: "Alright, listen, Eddie. Didn't you say earlier that you have a paper to write for Langhorne?" He nodded. "I'll write it for you. If you'll introduce me to Josie, I'll write your Langhorne paper. You know I can." "Really, Foley?" "That's right, Eddie." "Alright, give me half an hour. I'll see what I can do." The half hour wait was an itchy one. Ted was on an unstoppable roll. He'd lined up an impressive array of conquests. Mostly guys, mostly about how he was going to be situated. I was neglecting to do that task, because it just wasn't in me to do it. Whatever was going to happen at CHS, I was ready to wing it. After ending the half hour with ten minutes of stumble-across-the-ice, I walked into the changing room to find Edward sitting there with Josie. "Josie, this is Adam Foley. Foley, call me tomorrow night, I'll give you the assignment." "You got it, Eddie." I got terrible stomach butterflies; I thought I might vomit. I thought meeting Josie would be an ebullient, light-on-it's-feet kind of production. Josie's vibe up close was very heavy. I mumbled a few random pleasantries. Josie said, "Are you OK? You seem a little tense." I was extremely tense. "No, just recovering from falling on my ass out there." "Do you want to go for a walk?" "OK." Down the stairs we went, out into the lot. "Here's what I'm going to help you with, Adam Foley. Here's what you need. You think you know who girls are— you think you know what girls want. This is not about us being friends or not friends. You sought me out, here I am, but I'm going to give you my diagnosis." We were behind the big stupid rock— none of the older kids was around. "Here— you get to kiss me one time, no tongue." As was incredible to me, I found myself momentarily lip-locked with Josie. A group of older kids, twenty yards away, behind Elkins Park Square, were moving towards us. The thing had to end very fast. The kiss was over. "Now, here's who you are. You're the guy who always sticks out like a sore thumb wherever you go. You're the one who wants to do everything your way. You think you're special. What I have to tell you is this— you are special, Adam, but in this world not everyone likes that. Your friend goes out of his way to make

himself not special. You need to learn from us— you can't always be exactly who you want. Eddie said, you're a year younger than us. When you get to where we are, you better understand that the more you stick out, the more you're a target. So, here's how you pay me back." We went over to Hillary's in the Square; I bought her an ice cream cone. She ate it quickly, standing in the Square. Then, she took my hand, led me back to the rink. Even before the top of the stairs, she disappeared into a group of Abington kids. Had I learned my lesson? Sort of. I associated being special with the magic of words and music. I wasn't a target yet, except maybe with Dad. Who knew? Now, I had an extra paper to write. I would try, for Eddie and Langhorne, to make it a special one.

#37

Bars work into sex equations; so does travel. When Wendy and I hook up in New England, we manifest not only guts and bravado, but glamor. We are transients there, doing what transients do. What I make with Kyra, who shares a large flat in the East Village with one of her also-fashionista friends, is even more gruesomely constructed. Kyra is John's sister. John and I are running the Philly Free School together. When we stop off to spend the day with Kyra in Manhattan, and then the night, I know instantly that (as is gruesome to admit I could be this crass) I can make a score here. Kyra is drastically, dramatically about charm, glamor, and intrigue. The raven-haired, buxom look she favors is pure Liz Taylor, skin slightly bronzed more than Liz, and, most importantly, a physiology which does not say (as most physiologies do) no instantly. All her postures, jests, glances suggest there is room in her. Yet with John to think of (this is his sister), the transient sucker punch into bed would depend on me being (as Wendy had been to her benefactors in New Hampshire) more brutish than usual. Decentered away from our personal norm, against a novel backdrop, in the middle of a period of expansion and growth, why shouldn't I be brutish? Now's the time. At a bar not far from her flat, John and I hold court. Here is Samantha, a friend of mine from the old Manhattan days. We flirt outrageously, too. I've got a girl on either side of me on an elegant sofa (Manhattan, more than Philly, favors sofas in bars). John is bemused. Punch-drunk on all the attention, I understand that Samantha lives too far away, in the recesses of Brooklyn. Tonight it must be Kyra, or no one. John is also high as a kite and more tolerant than most. When the three of us tumble drunkenly back into Kyra's apartment, the crunch comes. I'm either going to make a play to sequester myself in Kyra's room with Kyra or be more civil with John, and less pushy generally. Fortunately or unfortunately (and channeling, perhaps, Baudelaire's Good Devil), I feel the game within me, and have just the right concoction running through my veins to see it through to the end. A bar is a game; travel is a game, often, too; and when game-stakes are raised, you either rise to the occasion or you don't. The door is eventually shut on John, who can't not laugh (welcome to P.F.S., right?), and I am alone with Kyra. The night is hot, her room not air conditioned. We don't talk much. I find myself riding the game, pushing the river, and what happens is not masterful or revelatory, but adequate. The fashionista appurtenance items (mostly clothes to be debuted, turned in to authorities, or discarded), sounds of the East Village beneath us, even Marlboro Reds to smoke (not my usual brand), all coalesce into a sense that having started on one square on a game board (that's bar-talk), I've done a game version of a check-mate. I've been a Zen arrow into space the right way. Even as I am not unaware that deeper questions and resonances are being unanswered, and John has real reason to be annoyed. For the night, I am Kyra's appurtenance item and she mine. This inverts who I am with Trish and Jena, but once the action's over and Kyra's asleep, there's no way out. The equation is: you did it, and that's it.

#45

Growing up with Emma, who had been in my class at CHS, wasn't like growing up with Roberta. It wasn't like anything. Emma, a lanky blonde with long, lank blonde hair, a chiseled, cat-like face, and long limbs, looked like a stunt double for Trish, and had been merely an acquaintance. She was quiet, and kept to herself. Her friends were among the geeks of the class. Why and how Emma knew to show up now, in the midst of all this turbulence with Trish, I have no idea, but she did. I laughed because she so resembled Trish, but I was also aroused. I liked the idea, past N and Roberta, of a real hook-up within my class, even ten years after the fact. She was there, at the Last Drop, on a succession of key summer days, in a sleeveless white blouse. After all these years, her cat-face grew on me as enchanting, compelling, suggestive of something her whole presence insinuated— she identified heavily with Trish, and had a female impulse to demarcate turf which could also be hers. Whether she'd been stalking us or just heard what was happening with us from the suburbs, I still don't know. I knew she was commuting to Center City from somewhere. What she wanted was just one night with me, I later concluded. When, on the one late afternoon I made my way with her back to Logan Square, we were ensconced, she took out a bottle of Robitussin as though it were an aperitif, and she were Trixie Belle. She wanted, as she said, a Robo-trip. It was part of the magic of that night that Emma wound up encapsulating for me so many different partners at once, including partners merely being anticipated. I found it easy to begin making love to her, because she made it easy. Her equation was interesting, about female levels of awareness— everything about her physiology screamed, you always wanted me the most, but you just didn't know it. You're a man— you don't know these things. I have delivered myself to you because you need me now, and I need you. Now you may begin to learn who you are. And we made love with great fluidity and rapidity, and then we made love again. Her fluidity was like Heather's would be, and the sense of being lulled into a trance of perpetual, high-intensity intercourse, on the bed, then on the living room floor, on the couch in the living room, from the front, from the back, was like Jena. We each gave the other a show-stopping performance, manifesting (as was odd, and as I was not too dumb and callow to notice) an inversion of our years of starving for each other. The absolute ecstasy of several mutual orgasms was the tactile insignia, as it might've been with Roberta and N, of an eternity of denial overcome. This, even as what was built into us both had been noticed only by her. Why, in sex equations, women usually hold the cards: women are receptive to sensory data on a deeper level than men, and have a primordial understanding of physiology, of bodies and more bodies, which men do not. When bodies speak, women listen more. Emma and I shared a home, but only she registered what our bodies shared, what was in them. When Trish showed up, it was a red flag from nature that it would be Emma's time to show up too. Even if it proved to be the cosmic design that after one night, I would never see Emma again.

#26

When I converse with N on the phone, in about my thirteenth year, our heads open up together, and we create an imaginative landscape out of nothing at all. Events around us, our classmates, notorious or boring or uproarious events of the days get used as fodder, parties, dances, and we hoist the whole rig up and sail it into the sky. We dance ourselves around our desire for each other: are we friends, or could we be more? When we broadcast together, other will sit and listen, spellbound. But to the left and to the right, even at thirteen, is the impulse to share our bodies as well as our souls and brains. N is conservative this way. She maintains a deep need to keep physicality light in and around her— she doesn't play sports, can't swim, is an excellent dancer but not a dab hand as a walker of city blocks, either. All her thoughts are of transcendentalizing past her own body, which is arrayed around her like marsh to wade through. The problem is a hold she wants to maintain over my emotions. We act, often, like newlyweds, but because she will not submit to me physically in any way, my emotions, unconsciously set at a skeptical angle, cannot cleave to her finally, like a ship docking in at a port. Sexual devotion often starts, I learn later, with the body, the physical mechanism. Our bodies are the primordial fact of who, and what we are. So, we talk on the phone for hours, imaginative leap follows imaginative leap, but imaginative leaps are not a basis for a man's devotion. Not that I'm aware of this at thirteen. All I know is that our brains are doing something intense together, and I like the feeling, but my soul craves a reality somewhere between us that cuts deeper, from sharper, starker angles, into a sense of achievement, conquest, victory, a permanent sense of marking and being marked. Later, it is Trish who brings all these algorithms together. She knows only too well what I am, and what I want. We imaginatively leap all over the cosmos together, hand in hand or separately, but the climax, the final imposition of the most profound shared imagination into the most profound imaginative leap, is back into our bodies and, when we are good together, out again, out into a re-entry of the cosmos, as a finality.

#27

Audrey, as a tangent to N, took the idea, not of broadcasting gossip but of sharing and disseminating literature, as a fait accompli move to establish romance, drama, suspense, and rich entanglement in her life. Prisoner of a rich background, and with a preacher for a father, she latched onto me as a purveyor of sweets for her, from my books to my looks to a sense of deference she wanted me to sometimes have as a way of demonstrating respect for her roots. The one determinative moment— we stood, with a crowd of poets, outside a bar in Andersonville, Chicago, as a night of festivities ended, and I was either going to pick her up somehow or not— ended in, for me, a practical response of denial. Her apartment was in an obscure neighborhood in Chicago, I was staying in the distant 'burb Palatine, and was due in Rockford the next afternoon. For Audrey, as she was later candid about, I was resisting something compelling in the universe which required that we spend the night together. She was heartbroken, with her Indiana-bred sense of being cornfed (blonde, voluptuous, clear complexion), and with the conviction she had that anything she wanted could always be hers. Rich equations suffer greatly from senses of entitlement, emanating from the rich, and dousing all that they touch with a glaze of non-recognition, of obliviousness. This was Audrey's contradiction— give her a text, available to be read at her leisure, incapable of vocalizing need or difference of any kind, and she could rise to the occasion brilliantly. Texts had a way of ejaculating into her brain and heart tissue, in a lovemaking routine (with the right text at the right time) extremely pleasurable for her. As I stood with her outside Moody's Pub, a flesh and blood entity— needy, morose, possibly surprising or disobedient the wrong way— turned her interest tempered with diffidence. This decided the night for us. Had we been ensconced together for several days, as I had been with Wendy, things might have been different. But when two possible lovers are too transient to each other, the magic spells don't work, incantations fall flat, and it is learned again that for equations to take on flesh in the world, there is no substitute for real, raw time.

#12

Indeed, some equations are about nothing but pain: consummate, unceasing, unyielding pain. With Heather, the extreme fluidity of our intercourse lubricated into being a mixed set of thoughts and emotions. Ecstasy and agony remained in exact, if delicate, balance. From the moment I met Roberta, while still a young boy, her presence engendered in me a sense of extreme attraction and craving, soured by a sense of her as obstinate, obdurate, and generally a hard case. Roberta as a girl had olive skin, not unlike N; lank tawny hair which fell over her eyes and which she used to preen; a sleek, straightforwardly pretty face, which emphasized prominent cheekbones and (slightly) buck teeth. The story of the emergence of her clique in my class, as of fifth grade at Elkins Park Middle School, and my brief immersion in it, is not worth telling. The story of a dynamic tinged towards Pip-Estella, her used by forces above her to torment me, is worth telling. I was in the clique briefly, then out. What caused both of us the most pain, is a simple reality which animated everything which happened between Roberta and I: she wanted me as much as I wanted her, and we both knew it. We were condemned to be in love at the most star-crossed possible angle, and for many years, until the end of high school. Me in the clique, then half-in, then not in at all didn't matter: a force behind her, built into Cheltenham, the school district and the community, compelled her to play Estella for as long as she knew me. Roberta coped by halving things: she was only sort-of Estella, sort of a would-be lover, sort of with Cheltenham, sort of against. Her own equation was to take whatever emotional response she had to me and tramp it into the ground, just to survive, just to eat. We were playing tennis once, and she broke from her protocol (and disrupted the game) just to tell me a parable of sorts. There was this guy she was mad about, but she knew it just couldn't work out. And she'd done everything she could to try and jockey for a different position in her community, and failed. I was still a child, with a child's level of awareness, but even then I knew she sounded suspiciously like she was talking about me. Cheltenham had thrown her a bone: she had one chance to communicate to me, however obliquely, how she felt in my direction. The parable half-worked. I was never really able to achieve certainty, for myself, however, that it was about me. And for seven years, the half-assed romance stumbled forward. Communities destroyed individuals, as usual. Senior year, the sadness of her half-assed inscription in my yearbook leaned on N, who was more fulsome, for redemption; and both leaned me forward, into my days, to reach the apogee I achieved with Trish.

V. Double Sonnets

The E Sequence

I. The Painter

The compact red book I ran around with:
Crowley's *Book of the Law*. I was goaded
into knowledge that a reckoning was at hand.
An archetypal Goddess had manifested as
a tactile reality in my life. An image had been
seared into my mind; a painting called *The Vessel*;
it was hers, and yet I was a married man. The only
path forward that tempestuous autumn of '01 was to
cheat. The book laid down a gauntlet of what
it meant to act in the world with a genuine sense
of destiny; to be a man who had the mettle to be
a real force of nature. She knew, my wife, that I
had been possessed, and that winds were blowing
me in a new direction, towards the forbidden.

I had, it seemed to me, no choice. The night I
spent with the painter, in a studio in PAFA, I
discovered what it meant to have a hinge to
true will about matters of the heart. She kept
paintings there, of Dionysus and Apollo, and she
would make me a myth, too. We shared red
wine that had the effect of being blood between
us; our chalice was the air, the sound of water
pipes late at night in an old building, darkened
corridors meant to hold only us, bathrooms
which could be used as portal-ways into starry
worlds. As I gathered steam, I felt the book
hover in the air as well, a piece of text writ in
boiling blood, pummeling towards spring.

II. The Studio

The vista which then opened was one I never
could've anticipated in the Nineties— the PAFA
campus was set as a series of jeweled buildings
smack in the center of Center City Philadelphia,
a few blocks from City Hall. Mary was then still
in enough good standing to maintain her own
studio on campus. I had to sign in as a guest on
the ground floor every time I visited. The room
was a large rectangle, and the elongated back wall
was one big window, looking out on the western
progression of Cherry Street, towards Broad. Until
Mary and Abby, I had no fixed notions of painting;
now, I dived in with the frisson of one let loose in
a wonderland. Everything about Mary was magical

to me, and the canvases arrayed around the studio,
largely male nudes, recumbent or not, plugged into
Mary's fascination with classical mythology, and made
a case for Mary as a Don Juana, a seducer of men.
Heady stuff, and often Mary's tales were about men
who had posed for her. Vertiginous, but I was on
the verge, nonetheless, of a full-on love affair, maybe
marriage, to a women powerful enough to be called
a *Creatrix,* a female goddess in the world, and I knew
it. Sleeping with Mary meant something it never could
with others; rather than a mere palliative, if you could
get her to put out in the studio, you were plugging into
a mythological web, glistening and intricate, stitching
yourself, possibly, into history, and the come was in color—

III. Riot Grrrl

Prize partridge around Media, Mary was also a bad
seed or rebel par excellence. She doped and fucked her
way in divergent directions; got dropped into hospitals;
rode with her assumed husband on a motorbike;
in the parlance of the times, granting complete credulity
to her tales, a wilder riot grrrl never drew breath.
What mattered to me was whether I had her or not.
This remained variable, as Abby also appeared, and both
of us caught viable action on the side. One night
she arrived by cab to Logan Square, in frilly dress,
hair in a bun. I grabbed her and fucked her on the floor,
and that (somehow) was it— marriage consummated. Even if Mary
never really got tired of moaning about my drug
shortages— Klonopins, Ritalin. Couldn't love be enough?

The only one who ever drove me into delirium fits
with jealousy, Mary was. She was adept at being
a little lost sheep, for anyone (curator or not) to salvage
and rescue, if I had displeased her even for a night.
The only one who ever made me weep from pure
obsessive anguish, so that so much of my life became
dramatic, I might as well have been back with the Outlaw
Playwrights. I knew now how to evaluate compositions,
the quirks of colorations, what the Renaissance taught
us about body-soul unity; more importantly, for me, I
knew what body-soul unity meant when an individual
falls in love. I cannot say, the only one I was ever in
love with; but the deepest sense ever was, of love running
in red blood through my veins, out of my pores, into her.

IV. Starlight

Maybe it's because October nights on the East
Coast can still be sultry; it was still reasonably
early, 10:30; us three in our usual semi-stupefied
lethargy got a rush of energy, decided to take a walk
over to Fresh Grocer at 40th and Walnut, get some
grub, often in short supply at 4325. I got French bread,
Mary got vegetables for stir fry, for Abby too,
and as we walked home what awaited us was little
we didn't want. We were too stoned to be self-
consciously anything, but you can bet we were
stared at, with our symmetrical features, sculpted
cheekbones, and yet West Philly had glitter all over it
because everybody hit the street simultaneously,
we walked, levitated with everyone, and everyone levitated with us—

the house party a few nights later was beyond
levitational. Every young painter in Philly crowded
into the lived-in, yellow lit kitchen to do whiskey
shots, and drove a bunch of points home about how
the city was now working together, firing off on all
cylinders at once, even as Mary abstained, as usual,
from alcohol, which took her nervous system and trashed
it. The painters were obliging about the poet's participation,
as laughter ricocheted into the grassy backyard area,
with its rusty fence, small concrete plots, placing us
in a city space with real green in it, even as trees
began to yellow, and as the warm weather held.
When the door to Mary's room shut an hour later,
we took the starlight in with us, painted and owned it.

V. Live Forever

We had it then— not just the embedded depth
of soul love, but glamour right on the ground,
as the formation formed by which Mary and I spent
all of our nights together. Our route— West
Philly to Logan Square and back— took two
disparate locales, made them whole, out of
a sense that they were meant to be wed, just
as we were; Logan Square with its sleek, modish
urbanity, West Philly with its rusticity, climbing
ivy, plus the obvious inversion of a well-worn
media cliché against it. By New Years Eve, 2003,
there was so much gaiety in the air, we'd pierced
a hole in the obdurate, obtrusive surface of human
life, to find ourselves in a tropical paradise—

I relate to it, now, as a clear demonstration that
Heaven on Earth happens. In Abby, we had a soul
sister; in the large co-op twin on Baltimore Ave.,
a safe haven; my flat in Logan Square created
a different, representatively recent kind of stage;
all were playgrounds where the dope, pills, every
thing else was shared by all, as all of our bodies
were for each other and no one else. The profound
ecstasy of that New Years was that a bunch of
artistic misfits found ways and means of being
completely at home in the world, against constraints
that needn't have been there, with a serene sense
of what it might mean to live forever. We were
right, then and there, to be who we were, and we knew it—

IV. Other Curiosities

Stoning the Devil (3/27/04, Kelly Writers House)

In Baudelaire's famous prose poem, *The Generous Gambler*, we follow the narrator, ostensibly Charlie B. himself, as he encounters a mysterious stranger on a Parisian boulevard. The stranger, lo and behold, turns out to be Lucifer himself. Baudelaire depicts him as a man of wealth and taste, who has, indeed, been around for many a long year, and stolen many a man's soul and faith. Of course, Baudelaire follows him. They get regally smashed, and the Devil reveals to him the secrets of the universe. For Baudelaire, stoning the devil means getting him stoned, wooing him, bringing him into the human fold for a little Dionysian sport. The problem with the Baudelairian method of Satan-handling is that you lose your soul. The Devil corrupts you to the point that right and wrong have no meaning; irony enters the blood and chills it; paradox becomes poison; everybody looks like a leper; and you can't feel anything. It helps to remember our good old read-it-in-seventh-grade friend Young Goodman Brown. His encounter with Beelzebub leaves him embittered, disenchanted, but at least he still has a soul (or, as much of a soul as a tee-totaling Puritan can have). Young Goodman Brown stones the devil by rejecting him out of hand. Stoning here means throwing stones: even if it be from the glass house of mortal ignorance.

So, somewhere between the Baudelairian and Hawthornian models of Lucifer-human relations, we may find an ideal solution. We can lure the Devil into drunkenness and then bash him over the head with a rock, or we can bash him over the head with a rock and then slip him a joint to ease the pain (mostly our pain, of course). The Devil, the epitome of imperviousness, will go on being the great professional Ironist he is (a bit like Frank Zappa). The reward of this balanced approach for us, as writers, is that we can lure the Devil close to us, just close enough to learn some of his simpler tricks, then send him on his way when he starts demanding blood. Muslims the world over "stone the Devil," but I fear their ritual lacks a certain subtlety and understanding of Satanic grandeur- how it can be harnessed, refined, made to serve human ends. The Devil, more than any other Being, understands the complexity of existence. I would guess that things are as complicated in Hell as they are here. In the end, what is a art but a testament to the complexity of life: manifold levels and layers, perpetually enclosing us in a wide web. One could make the argument that art is essentially ironic, in the sense that it posits unreachable worlds that we long for, but cannot touch. We must face it: art is a Devil's game. We're here to play, and we guarantee you it will be more fun than Yahtzee.

Feel

I.
I saw the greatest artists of my generation parched, hardened & scarred
by a virtual machine,
blood cleaned from shiny surfaces, purposed to cut out the soul's wisdom, the body's
agita, the heart's
heaviness, creators neutered & spayed by a decaying empire, wired
for a never-ending battle
w/ bureaucrats, corporate drones & art-world phonies, bones rattling
in Philly February snow & ice,
D.C.'s perpetual snooze, loose NYC streets that tighten round the Village,
while they tried to chill-pill themselves,
direct their energy to the task at hand, finding a plan, an escape route from playing
cogs, greased-gears freezing all around them—
who worked for banks & were fired for downloading porn, moved into dank South Philly
studios, recorded, put out CDs, whored themselves to wine-stores & occult dives
where poor mottled matrons paid ten dollars for card readings & felt themselves
bleed at the collapse of the Tower,
who stripped, did coke, published poems on the Net, learned massage, started as Temps,
ended as Temps, sang dirges at West Philly art-parties for free Schlitz, dove-
tailed joints in brick alleyways, scars glossed over w/ blush, sweaty-breasted,
who wrote comic book epics for guitar & voice, developed mystical Jesus raps at Goth
clubs, Christian-blissed as Trent Reznor blared through stacks of amps & love-
boys got blow-jobs in corners,
who were pregnant at 21, had & ignored the kid, got locked in jail for neglect, expecting
daddy to come w/ bail, no help from a shitty city,
who threw out poetry to work for an architect, drank w/ kids in Manayunk bars
& got a beer-gut, "make it new" screwed into soft-fucks,
who were forced into drag by failure, post-avant punk records dis-chorded into oblivion,
scarcely attended bumper-boring tours from Alaska to Milan,
who made the cover of the City Paper, lost a sugar-mommy & dealt coke, wigger pants,
trench-coated, eyes bleary, nose runny, walking round & round liquor
stores miming interest in Pinot Grigio,
who got on planes to London to live in sardine tins, no sex for two years, music biz lies
don't work even near the Hyde Park Serpentine,
who spent afternoons at McGlinchy's cadging Manhattans, making out w/ strangers,
blowing band dudes w/ Ron Wood haircuts, dreaming of a Khyber stage &
the place packed,
who lost a hustler father to heart failure, took Greyhounds to Atlantic City weekends, put
trust-fund dollars on poker chips glistening black in the lurid light, ice rattling
in gin tumblers, Italian pimps leaning forward for the kill in silk pants,
who painted Apollos & Athenas in high-windowed studios in the Gilbert Building,
getting laid on pull-out black sofas stained cadmium red,

who went to D.C. to lobby, did puppet shows miming councilmen in Philly, gave up lit to look for kinks in The System & were left holding onions in the Italian Market,
who managed Chinese restaurants in State College, sang shirtless for bands at the White Lodge, sailed off to Oregon looking for a label,
who followed two L.A. chicks from Bar Noir to Ocean City, snorting H off a hotel toilet & becoming a ghost & drifting down halls & collapsing on carpeted stairs,
who played soccer w/ tin cans on summer afternoons in alleys off of South Street, Blow Fly singing "you're too fat to fuck" in the background,
who took in jail-bait to complete a ménage a trios, then watched her try to jump out the window of the Highwire Gallery, strip at parties but for a thong, get arrested for stealing from a Verizon register, all the while keeping two boyfriends in South Jersey, construction workers, blind to the bricks,
who spent nights chasing hipster-girls in Upper Darby, paying the cab-fare from Dirty Frank's, then left to rot on the downstairs couch surrounded by plastic Christmas candles & a mother's footsteps down the stairs,
who curated minor shows at the Kelly Writer's House, dreaming of future glory, having Koons & Schnabel show up & kiss ass to the one & only,
who shouted at drunken idiots through bull-horns on 4th Street Mardi Gras, perched in windows like Dada ready-made patrolmen,
who took girls to the Walnut Street Bridge & laid in the grass at midnight, 'til cops white blazing light scared their pants on in the summer mist,
who stumbled half-awake onstage at Doc Watson's, ploughed through a short set & sat at the bar knocking back Tequilas, eager for the next gig,
Grape Street, Pontiac Grille, La Tazza, Balcony, hallowed stages where the eternally neglected Philly bands knocked out Fixx-mixed Corgan-riffed Patti Smith blues, watched by no one in particular, & thus by the Gods,
who started independent newspapers & did press-runs of 10,000, garnering national acclaim & absolutely no money,
who worked nights at the Taco House on Pine Street, smoking pot in the back room, scribbling notes for an endless first novel to be read at Molly's Books while despair unfolded of ever knowing anything about sex,
& who therefore threw out a U of Arts degree to strip, thinking of Colette & Courtney Love, wanting to know what this flesh thing was all about,
who died in obscurity in Roxborough, then had volumes of poems thrown away by a jealous lover who was somehow managing the estate, & is therefore even more obscure, Alexandra, unacknowledged legislator of Philly lit, stalking health food at Essene, reading at Robin's, always taking the bus, a car too much hassle & no time to scribble poems in the back,
what were you working for if not eternity? Your name up in the klieg lights of greatness, may happen yet, some of us are holding a torch, will continue to, for you—
who had pictures taken w/ Allen Ginsberg, then locked themselves in the house once the Painted Bride Quarterly was gone for good,
who were reduced to writing fishing books when the poetry wouldn't fly, then insisted on comparing themselves to Joyce, Proust, & Kafka,
who hooked up w/ metal-faced teenagers in stairwells, sucking on brass where a nipple

should've been, riding a nitrous high into a screened window,41
who met guys on the Internet & moved up to Philly from Florida, settled in studios at Juniper & Locust & were watched by pervs in the parking lot next door,
& then joined spoken-word bands & did shows in baby-doll dresses, took up w/ a poet, got cheated on by a poet & went back to Florida & came back again,
who decorated an apartment w/ fourteen dead Christmas trees, licked up pine needles on slow nights & had whiskey-drunk one-night stands to kill time,
who decided to move to L.A., was psyched to move to L.A., got everything packed to move to L.A. & then realized that there wasn't any money left,
or moved to L.A. via Daddy's money & helped sign bands to major labels, gave up painting, got a new boyfriend & turned into a palm tree,
who appointed themselves guardians of Duchamp's bikes, staged toilet races in Old City, installed grungy bathtubs, humongous cheese graters & doodles of teeth being shaved in space 1026, welded themselves to the Last Drop & the Bean, were followed by throngs of Dada-minded hipsters, then went into hiding,
who bought condos off Washington Square, were ripped off by newspapers, wrestled w/ an incomplete second novel & an NYC agent w/ a talent for evasion,
who wrote columns for Philly Weekly & earned the hatred of hipsters for loving Simon & Garfunkel, saw the world behind thick glasses, wrote songs & earned a modest following & was then murdered by a divorce,
who found themselves up against an Ivy League wall, fought the Philistines w/ Keats, & made Penn bow down to the genius of Wordsworth,
who sat in coffee shops talking poetics & politics, acknowledging the impotence of the current generation in fighting Bush & his cronies,
& also acknowledging that this generation is a small generation & virtual & unlikely to change anything substantial now that the Boomers run everything, & it'll be this way 'til they die out, thirty more years of boredom,
who served cocktails to Centrist poets in Boston, had miscellaneous affairs w/ Philly writers & others, wanted to be Bonnie & Clyde w/ out Clyde,
who made a mint off a rock record in Japan, spent it all & started Temping, all the while looking to keep falling in love all the time in the Village,
who put together multi-media shows, served hash brownies & whiskey, made a little money & used it to buy more hash,
who e-mailed Noam Chomsky, decided not to be Zionist & took off a Star-of-David, realizing that the Holy Land is only an interior reality,
who went to live on a kibbutz & came back disillusioned w/ everything & not having fought in the army went out & bought guns instead,
who fled to San Francisco for no apparent reason after putting out a book in Philly & watching it sit unmolested at Book Trader,
who was fired from Barnes & Noble for feeling up female employees, worked in a loony bin, wrote in the loony bin, then caved in & joined the Masters program at Temple,
who roamed Villanova searching for dead souls, waiting for the words to come back as years slipped away into a haze of academic mediocrity,
who stood in line w/ bags of pasta at dollar stores, picked up butts from sidewalks, took resin hits, chomped on bits of stale bread & shat in buckets,
who did Action paintings on cold nights in Northern Liberties, slaved away at Office

Cents lugging parcels around Center City, latched onto female grad students w/ swank apartments & made slow-motion art movies of silent screams & hollering demons wading through the half-frozen Delaware,
who painted Kabbalistic cool-color fantasies & sent them to Tyler openings, managed restaurants & threw canvases away & walked around Germantown awaiting the arrival of the Sixth Race who will cool the Earth & set it on the Tree of Life & protect it from malignant ministers of Malkuth,
who retreated to Philly after 9/11 to find the city half-dead & the sinking stink of global warming hovering over Rittenhouse Square like a huge clove of garlic, & the vampires w/ Gucci glasses wandering & watching & warping what tenderness remained for lovers of cigars & Salman Rushdie,
who mourned for Rachel Corrie from a perch at the Good Dog, wrote secret pro-Palestinian pamphlets & hid them under socks & condoms,
who tried painting & poetry & music but found the balance in yoga, only to find the yogic mind devalued in the capitalist slip-stream of a run-down economy, & thus made plans to go to New Mexico for the summer & squat amidst clay,
who found themselves a million miles away from everything on Race Street, so retreated to Cherry St. to hit on Moore girls & manicure-giving bar-maids, & took one home & found her ready & then was too drunk to fuck,
who ploughed through five years PHD work to find a vacant job market & the few open classes not enough to pay rent, so built houses in the 'burbs & sipped Bud in rabbi's back yards hearing stories of Moses & Joshua & Aaron, & the story of Job hit a special nerve,
who got fat in Bainbridge Street lofts living off pot-dealing money, writing landscape poems remembering Virginia beaches & a shiksa's skinny little ass, how much give it had or didn't have as it bobbed up & down in the waves,
who met booty calls on the Franklin Institute steps & got naked & boned watched by Jane across the street fingering herself secretly,
who got sent to Budapest by parents to study math, having failed out of Penn & Temple & having been burned out by years of scraping three-chord riffs & hitting bars & orgies & all the time wondering why things seemed so empty,
who were exiled to academic New Hampshire, poems in hand, devising childhood vignettes of coffee Moms & smoking Dads & cold mornings out on Federal,
who kept afloat writing copy for Urban Outfitter's, getting blitzed at poetry parties & up-staging ex-boyfriends w/ yuppie-puppy hook-ups,
who worked as concierge at the Four Seasons, scored w/ a pale blonde bookstore chick only to have a bookstore Byron steal her back & write about it,
& you have to see him every day, he's always lurking in odd
café corners & no one knows what he's thinking or why,
(& in fact no one knows what anybody's thinking, it's a sin & a drag & candor is in short supply in an artificial virtual era, & our "there" is nowhere),
who collapsed in lines at Starbucks, knocking over displays of gourmet tea, spent two weeks in the psych ward at Jefferson, visited by solicitous boyfriends bearing chocolate & coffee table Raphael books & playing ping pong for hours while several schizophrenics huddle together watching "Sleepless in Seattle",
who picked up photographers in coffee-shops & boned them sans condom on piles

of black & white prints,
who prowled through suburbs w/ a half-lit bowl, passing dread Cheltenham where endless tears flowed through virginal misery, stopping for a deep hit by the old house drowning nostalgia in thick green smoke,
who toured the world & got famous & threw it away for a needle & couldn't sleep for the thought that the thing could never happen again,
who sat at Gleaners waiting for contracting jobs, played UNO & Scrabble &were masters of both, well-spoken beneath knitted caps & trapped as lame tigers,
who got knocked up by Rastafarians & were left to raise babies on a waitress's salary, picking up tips & shit for being bitter, sister at home keeping the baby fed,
who wrestled demons of bi-polarity tool-box in hand, looking for lost screws & sockets, fixing locks toilets hinges refrigerators, hoping the voices wouldn't come at an important moment, rattling through the ether w/ a sinister cackle, mocking the silliness of ever doing anything other than smoke drink & fuck,
who were flushed out of New Orleans like a tampon back into the soot of Spruce Street, drinking through frigid winter Philly doldrums, mornings too raw for walking, too-white music in the clubs, no mint juleps on the menu, only Jager & Jack & Stoli & Captain Morgan's,
who got it on w/ keyboardists for riot grrl bands in bathtubs flooding tiles splashing walls all for ten seconds of the ultimate chorus,
who slept w/ a different guy every night two months then took a year off writing confessional verse on My-Space for 40,000 friends,
every one of whom wanted sex, love, a chance to hold somebody tenderly & forget that the whole virtual charade ever happened,
who labored through slow days in Philadelphia's dead-end streets, breezes annoyingly sharp where Market hits City Hall & the Broad Street line gets off,
who took the Broad Street Line to Allegheny to look at an art gallery as possible event-space but found a rat-infested shit-hole w/ a few bad Basquiat imitations on the wall & a toilet dripped on not by Pollock & a floor that would inspire another Munch & a girl from the Northeast before a mirror but only too round,
& who was forced to shut-down a co-op that no one could run any more in a fractious scene in a fractious city in a fractious country in a fractious era,
a fractious world where the artist counts for shit & waits for shit to happen that can't happen anymore because the numbers aren't there anymore the guns are,
the artist plays w/ guns, runs around shooting blanks at a dead world, curved into himself like an ingrown nail, hailed randomly by strangers to carry boulders up hills & teach the children, the noble artist looks for the transcendent will
the natural will the will-to-form, the will to turn around the deadness into something else a place where hope lives & allows one to cope w/ what's been dead in America for years the spirit the spirit the feeling that things are progressing must progress that progress can be made & there's no reason to wait for anyone else to do it cause why should they it falls on the artist to create it all him or her self & that's
what they've done & what they're doing & if a new dawn awaits or if it doesn't the the struggle goes on to put things down that mean something more than nothing which in this day & age means a hell of a lot because it's worth everything & you can't quantify it if you tried

II.

What hung over Philly, NYC, D.C., what swept through the freezing streets w/ sleet & cold snow?

Virtual women on cell-phones clicking buttons talking Jolie Spears & Simpson, stopping in boutiques to try on blouses & purses & cursing maxed credit cards!

Virtual men in suits & London fog overcoats talking numbers figures & prospects betting on Phillies Fliers Nationals Eagles living vicariously through overpaid clowns!

Virtual tunes on the radio, three chord synth-driven sappy cliché-ridden tripe belted out by Whitney Britney & Mariah, plush beat-programmed god-damned garbage!

Virtual movies w/ impossible sex scenes everything falling into place perfectly for two perfect bodies sans sloppiness of real caresses & how people look undressed!

Virtual galleries showing warmed over nihilistic facile installations of piles of rubbish lugged in w/ out skill craft or love sitting in a dump masquerading as art!

Virtual ads for virtual products gum that chews better Old Navy sweaters McDonald's hamburgers Toyotas Hondas Oldsmobiles hot wheels for prosperous suburban jerks jamming up expressways carbon dioxide flying into an atmosphere of used to be American greatness faded into days of fat complacence!

Virtual leaders vomiting sound-bites for virtual commentators Fox News CNN spouting platitudinous blarney to keep the asshole half of the country happy w/ a disastrous administration bucking the Kyoto treaty to keep oil flowing & wiping out regimes for no good reason other than crude black crap to kill forests!

Virtual TV "illustrating imbecile illusions of happiness" inducing mass spiritual slumber humming a nation to sleep believing everything's OK as long as Will & Grace stay happy inside the little idiot box on four hours a night!

Virtual bars & conversations knocking back twenty lagers & pints of Jagermeister trying to forget years frittered away in pursuit of music that didn't work paintings that didn't sell movies that went unseen as the world swirled by denying they ever knew or cared what art was!

Virtual love affairs based on fucking can't say what you're feeling but kneel before the altar of sex for its' own sake magazine culture!

Virtual friends virtually loving virtually hugging virtually drugging each other on the Internet fretting waiting for e-mail games of who writes first!

Virtual Jesus virtual Moses virtual Buddha virtual Jewish pleas to please return to Baruch Atah Adonai Elohanu Melech Chaolom,

Blessed art thou Lord of the Universe Forever & Ever Amen now please give me Bar Mitzvah money to spend on Nintendo Super Mario & a hot new I-Pod ready for instant use on spring afternoons before Hebrew School,

& the world is only virtually holy anymore & holiness can be bought in any store where money changes hands cause solvency is Heaven Thy Kingdom Come Thy Will Be Done our Father, Holy Ghost & Son delivered all in holy green!

III.

suffer ye victims
of a virtual age!
suffer ye victims
of Microsoft rage!
suffer ye noble,

wayward as Shelley,
suffer ye hopeful,
fire in belly!

suffer a new, bitter, screwed, littered America!
suffer ye who know Jesus w/ out casting
stones!
suffer the action abandoned to dumbness,
suffering the actions unspoken & loveless,
suffering the action unfurling our country,
picking up oil & oil-soaked money!

IV.
Allen Ginsberg! I'm w/ you in Heaven
where we feel like two sages,
where bread is unleavened
& no *granfalloon* rages!
I'm w/ you in Heaven
where the air is like nitrous,
where deadness is deadened
& you're plagued by no virus!
I'm w/ you in Heaven
where the feeling is placid,
where we're ruled by no felon
& lay tripping on acid!
I'm w/ you in Heaven
where the Buddha is grinning,
where no self-schemas leaden
lead to feelings of sinning!
I'm w/ you in Heaven
where poetry's money,
where the moon's always setting
& the sky's always sunny!
I'm w/ you in Heaven
where each spirit is sexy,
where you love who you're bedding
& you touch them correctly!
I'm w/ you in Heaven
where no fame is too famous,
where you know what you're getting
& all power is blameless!
I'm w/ you in Heaven
where each spirit can run things,
where self-governed settlements
take place of gun-slings!
I'm w/ you in Heaven

where America's perfect,
where the states have no nettles
& the taxes are worth it!
I'm w/ you in Heaven
where we're writing this poem,
where we're secretly betting
how far we can throw 'em!
I'm w/ you in Heaven
where the jokes are Eternal,
where the Hope is unfettered
& the dope is supernal!
I'm w/ you in Heaven,
where I'll stay 'til the war ends,
where I'll lay w/ your blessing
in the shade of a God-Head!

V.

Apocalypse! Apocalypse! It's over! It's over! We're living in twilight! Twilight the streets, twilight the houses, twilight the beats, twilight the louses! This is Rome, this is Nero, this is home, this is Zero! Apocalypse! Apocalypse! It's ending! Ending the guns, ending the money, ending the sun, ending the honey— bums, guns, sex, drugs, scum, Jesus, love, reason, all over! All ending! All covered! All bending! This is Rome, this is Egypt, this is feces! It's over! We're living in the End-Times! Over the getting, over the spending, over the feeling, over the lending! Forests, traffic, mountains, madness, plaster suburbs, drastic lovers, over! Apocalypse! Apocalypse! Twilight the schools, twilight the college, twilight the fools, twilight the knowledge! Twilight degrees, twilight alone, twilight & freeze, twilight unknown! Ending the quest, ending the artist, ending the rest, ending the parties! This is Rome, this Atlantis, this is home, this is hopeless! Dope, smoke, Starbucks, Hotmail, gropes, jokes, spirit e-mail, souls, moles, used car salesmen, fags, hags, gun-mad mailmen! Apocalypse! Apocalypse even for the faithful! Even for the Enlightened! Even for the patient! Even for the frightened! Even for the transcendent unbending resplendent defended art-mensch! Apocalypse! Run for shelter! Run for cover! Helter-skelter! Find a lover! Do something! Hold something! Screw something! Do someone! Before the end that's coming! Before the end that's drumming! Before the end of suffer! Before the end of lover! Act, suffer, feel, act, suffer, feel, & do it & do it again! Over the time when you live in a rhyme & it's okay to rest & to slowly confess! Apocalypse! Apocalypse! It's over! It's over!

from Bathhouse Blues

"That wasn't my fault! How could you say it was
my fault?" But it was his fault. Alex's
assistant that night was a stocky, good-looking
kid, but he had just let someone escape from
the fourth, "phantom" door, the narrow, skinny door.
Which, as Katyana knew, should've meant murder.
Yet, the signal given from outside warned that
The stocky kid had a lenient contract. They
not only couldn't kill him, they couldn't even
cut off his hands. To make matters worse, outside
a group of kids, including the escaped brat,
were standing, just outside spear-throwing range, to
mock the shitful nature of this bath-house. Kat
couldn't not be amused to watch Alex &
Locust fret, as though (she thought) they were spinsters
haggling over the price of yarn and sausages.
Juniper winked at her. Meanwhile, for everyone
but Kat, who was restrained, Sylvio had become
part of the scenery. His group had been quiet.
But the newly-elected leader Sylvio
stood behind, had dosed himself on some form
of speed, and was feeling puckish. Thoughtlessly,
he decided to capitalize on Alex
and Locust's slump, play intermediary.
For about twenty minutes, they let him ham,
argue loudly with them, about who should be
killed or not. Bad start, Jack. Juniper had to
frown— she'd forgotten the cute kid was his buddy.
Worse (puke, hurl), if he goes, that puts the cure one
next in line. Kat put on, she noticed, the requisite
poker-face, but was shaking slightly. Alex
gave the signal to stop the proceedings, to
"have a little fun." He has his minions,
including the stocky kid (eager to redeem
himself), surreptitiously surround the clown,
stranded far from Sylvio and his other
friends. Alex, still seated on his throne, bellows
"You're getting up our asses, you little shit.
Now, you tell us— why should we let you live, huh?"
They prod him with spears, and there it is— he's
shitting his guts out. Big turds, they notice, too,
speed turds. He tries to speak, fails. Alex gets up,
in formation with Locust, who's got the pistol
for the occasion, the "ass-pistol." Locust

has the mugs turn the now-limp kid over, sticks
the pistol where the sun don't shine. The kids' half-
dead. Kat watches Sylvio not watch, but not
shit or vomit either. The other two she
can't find in the darkness. Once they've kicked the turds
out of the way, taken turns with the corpse, it's
official— Sylvio's at the head of the
posse. Yet, his first administrative move
is a wise one— the three close ranks, and shut up.
Unfortunately, Alex and Locust have
noticed what a cutie-pie he is. Alex
gazes at him, and smiles meaningfully.
They ask Juniper, and she's forced to confess—
third night for them. The rest of tonight, and one
more. Sylvio's own ass hurts badly. He holds
in what he must. He's afraid to look at Kat
now, afraid to look around. Kat's also scared.
Yet, as she thinks, the bullshit work continues.
Juniper sniffs out in Sylvio— this kid's
got a reason to live. He's not all hopeless.
Why? Did somebody promise him something?
He must have lines running past us somehow, or
a relative who can set him in place somewhere.
Kat's like that too, somehow. Only I know for
a fact that she's got no one behind her. I
do what I can, but it has to be her looks
or nothin' else, babes. And that's no sure bet at
all. Kat's thought about Sylvio is more raw—
whether he can get it up or not, whether
he can do come-insides. Probably not, she
thinks, but hopefully fertile enough to have
kids with. It's a buzz around Sylvio, Alex
notices. So he makes a point, before one,
to force Sylvio to call a few shots for
him, setting everyone on edge again. One
more night, everyone knows— even Locust looks
at Alex, wondering what he has in store.

As Sylvio walks the perimeter of
the pool, he remembers being a kid, free
to ramble; sees in his mind's eye how it got
to this; his entire life a warm-up for
this dance with death. It was completely unfair.
As soon as the fateful three were in, Alex
singled out Sylvio for a bad call he
(supposedly) made the night before. No one
expected Alex to be this rough. Juniper

took it in the middle of things, but knew that
Kat would be in a lot of pain. Why she's
soft— beautiful bitches tend to be. Kat was
shaken, alright, and Alex and Locust were
onto her. They had other action going,
to run Kat around, disorient her, keep
her anxious about Sylvio's fate. A tense
hour passed; Sylvio kept walking. His two
chums couldn't hide but were quiet. Sylvio,
out of the blue, stunned everyone by leaving
the pool area, walking up to Alex
and practically spitting, "Look, you can't keep me
doing this forever. Just kill me or not,
you fucking assholes." Even Locust can't not
laugh. "Kid's got guts," he said. Yet Alex didn't
hear. His minions were asked to tie Sylvio
up and set him adrift in the pool; on
the brink of death, a terrible fate. Kat stamped
her foot quietly, aghast at Alex's
cruelty, stuffing pills down her throat secretly
to numb herself. Juniper sees— she can go
on. But oh what a price we have to pay here.
Locust has made clear to Alex that this one's
on him. Alex doesn't like humiliation
in his own domain. He personally has
Sylvio taunted, pistols aimed at him from
beside the pool, even blow-gun guys aiming
at his crotch. Sylvio's mind is so frenzied
with panic that he wishes he were never
born. He guesses he's already died and gone
to hell. Kat's half-numb, half-swooning. Juniper
gets an idea that takes advantage of Locust
not giving a shit. If she can convince Locust
that there's a lot of dope to be gained if this
is a "jump ship" night (as was true), just tell Alex
to wrap things up fast, then everybody wins.
So, she passes the word along. Locust responds
moderately. Alright, hold tight, everyone.
Alex gives the insignia of half-interest.

What happened then was pure dumb luck for all—
two of Alex's minions got in a fight,
and one killed the other. Nothing unusual
there. But the victor and assailant went on
to decapitate his victim, and play games
with the severed head. Locust told him to cut
it out, and he wouldn't. Alex sighed, because

these idiots were his responsibility.
So Alex had the assailant's head cut off,
too. But they started playing games with that, too.
Juniper was in stitches, and managed to
convey, I think it's time we call it a night,
boys. You know what's down the block. She knew it would
be her to save Sylvio, not Kat, but what
the fuck. It all happened as Juniper planned—
Sylvio's chums had scampered out the door,
and Juniper gently, thoroughly untied
him. He wasn't even half-dead, she noticed.
You're a strange kid, she told him, but we'll make sure
you get the right kind of credit for your nights
here. Sylvio can't talk much, and only thinks
about sleeping for a long time. Juniper
knows Kat will go after him eventually.
She has the word passed— Sylvio's fine. Kat takes
a deep breath, and briefly forgets that these drug
dens are even more scummy than the bath-house.
Kat knows that it's Juniper looking after her.
Fine. But now she knows roughly were Sylvio
lives, and begins to plan a stalking routine.
And to think, the whole thing started in the bath-house.
But now she'd be taking it where it belonged.
She did have a life past the bath-house, y'know...

The Witches of South Philadelphia

I.
If you ask the Devil she worships if he is
static or dynamic, a lightning bolt or a clod,
you'd be stunned to find him turning his
tools towards the erection of a greater God.
She's great with drinks, smokes, what's green.
Yet, as I was between engagements, how it was
I fell asleep I don't know. Her hands seemed
in the cake somehow, Carpenter Street laws
imposing three twists of her wrists, words
uttered backwards like a rogue monk might've
in 1311, ops number one with an arrow.
Birds
shot off the sill, mild November night, kinds of
confetti falling over me as the bloody corpse I was—

II.
"You don't question Mother Nature. What I have
between my legs is among the stars, out into space.
I carry Nature around and men can never really
know what Nature is. What I'm picking out of
the air now is who you are. So while we go through
these things, don't question, OK? Just understand
that what I'm doing is an expression of myself as
a Goddess, and as the Goddess I am."

III.
Dagger's flick into, under my skin, droplets
into the silver chalice, I could feel
myself almost swoon, fade into darkness.
She was quizzically writing a seal
onto parchment: here we stood, man and wife,
not forgetting what it meant that this
started in a classroom, for Christ's sake,
us opening our books onto Blake,
and the other she-devil laughs, sits
watching me too: two girls, two knives.

"Alright, cast the bloody circle, love, but
as you're off with your skirt please
remember to be gentle with your bit of
Nature, and don't be hard on my knees.
It moved in on us, her personal Devil,

lightning bolted our asses into greenness,
festooned the room with forwards noise;
she moved in on me, her Goddess-
assistant, licked clean powdered toys,
held onto me as magnet to metal.

5:30 am: I stepped out of the circle as she slept,
onto the balcony, darkness on Carpenter
conferring benediction, light as it crept
hitting me inwards, black turning lavender.
Taking up one of her notebooks, I
ripped out a sheet of paper, composed
a single stanza in terse couplets—
who the Goddess was, what she was
without a God, or with, in the drunkenness
of marriage to a man, and why.

IV.

So, through the Devil'd God, the she-Devil
Goddess prevailed into union with the poet.
What he learned in the South Philly flat: levels
of calm around good, evil, how to hold it.
The breakfast feast was more than waffles;
a green apple, cut open, exposed its raw life;
just as the sunrise exposed what was lawful:
she'd emerged, forwards, as my natural wife.

Dominique (3/27/04, Kelly Writers House)

So many stories are wrapped up in this next poem, some hilarious, some harrowing. It all revolves around a single woman and her phenomenal ability to enthrall men. Her name was, and is, Dominique, and I've never met anyone like her. When I met her, I was a high school junior and she was a freshman. She was stunningly beautiful, with a seductive, feline grace that suggested both Lolita and Liv Tyler. This alone wouldn't qualify her to play such an interesting part in my life and the lives of those around me; there were a lot of beautiful girls at Cheltenham; but Dominique had something more. What do we call that ineffable IT, that compelling magnetism that certain people have? Is it merely beauty, or charisma, or youth? For me, Dominique's charm lay in all these things, and also in something extra— a certain mischievous glint in her eye, a certain toss of her head, that suggested a sort of supernatural ecstasy, as if she were walking around in a narcotic trance all the time (which, I was later to learn, she was). Dominique was, quite simply, the most compelling female I'd met up to that point. Oddly enough, I didn't fall hard for her at all. I was able to keep my distance because, to a certain extent, I saw a hollowness beneath the charisma, an unwillingness to dig beneath surfaces and live truly. Dominique for me was a sort of caricature of adolescent sexiness, and I loved her archly condescending smile, but it didn't pierce me to the bone.

My best friend at the time, however, was absolutely, unbelievably, and pitifully smitten. He hung on her every word as though she was Godhead incarnate, recorded every encounter in an especially prized notebook, and just basically made an idiot of himself whenever she was around. Then, Dominique started dating another one of my friends, simultaneously making me her "Man of the Month," and things started to get really messy. A fist fight for me outside math class; a death threat; notes for me in the mail inscribed with lipstick, reading "He finds a deep satisfaction in pain; for that pain comes from her"; and other such nonsense. Basically Chris, aka Mr. Smitten, never forgave me for going after Dominique when he was so desperately in love, while Adam, Mr. Better-Attack-Me-Outside-Math-Class, became contrite years later and started randomly showing up at my gigs, camera in hand.

Having given you this background, you'll probably understand why running into Dominique on a sultry night in the East Village was such a big deal for me. I was lonely as hell in New York, overwhelmed, numbing myself with huge quantities of pot and speed pills. Dominique, for all her cattiness, rose to the occasion and delivered a knock-out performance as supportive friend with benefits. Unsurprisingly, she supported her academic career at NYU by dealing drugs, and I thought it would be fair game to throw that in, seeing as it was honest. Formally, this piece is me trying my best to write like Keats, sort of the same thing William Carlos Williams was doing in his early twenties. For me, WCW's Keatsian poems aren't that good, probably because he didn't know Dominique. She's a Muse— a real, honest-to-God morsel of madness. Not that I've ever forgotten her implacable selfishness, remorseless narcissism and insufferable insularity; but it pays to remember what's best in her.

Ry Mullen: A Collage

I. Stoned

He inherited the E from the two stooges
at the Main Line Art Center, who considered
themselves hipsters— as the pill kicks in,
he feels himself on a magic carpet above
Horsham, even as he sees from his seventh floor
window someone send a ricochet in his direction—

("I'm here on the sidewalk, if I need to be where
you are, its because I've seen the light about, y' know,
how to express yourself and stuff…")

Yeah, I acknowledge you, but who cares,
I levitate above these things (the last one,
saved up for years later, astonishes even him
as to how far you can "queer up" a simple,
or complex, love poem, and the poem begins,

"As the Septa station, plucked out from a million
iron-fields, ghettoes, coal-mines, arose like a sprung
moon in my brain, I took note of where you would
be on a night like this (fervent funneling of

resources, your pills in a cupboard marked "us"),
decided to grasp up your ass in the most tactile
way possible, so that whatever dreams of me
you might have could arise unimpeded by larceny,
murderous impulses…"

Ry can't take the thing further,
except to admit he's already half in Bryn Mawr,
standing erect in a formation he only half understands,
other parts erect from pure longing, and E's magic
carpet unstained by lecherous desires to do or dominate—

II. Snailed

Marshall,

It's with a certain amount of vehemence that I send you the new work, including the three enclosed. You of all people have to understand how fractured, how divided I am (seeing what circumstances allow me to publish now), and perhaps offer me a little compassion. What gets said at the Center can't matter, for these and other reasons. Not that I'm not happy to contribute. And, as you know, that's the kind of fag I am. So, from Horsham on out, here we go: "Iron-fields" does a dance with Breton and the Surrealists that's pretty overt. The proof is in the pudding and the difference that's a "differance" is that the queerness of the narrator is also pretty overt. This is what I eventually want credit for— taking impulses like Breton/Surrealist ones and melding them with Americanized versions of queerness. Your boys— Ashbery, O'Hara, and the rest— don't really do that task the right way, or are half-assed about it. This is writing "outside the box," and "Collateral" and "One Way Aubrey," the two minor ones here, extend the reach of a textual game that (without being unduly defensive) I happen to be playing for keeps. The next time we get wasted at the Center, try to understand that my "hang loose" persona is a mask (as yours must be too), and I mean it about the fags there but there's a serious purpose to my life and my writing that can't express itself. The work I'm sending out to the usual troughs doesn't count, even if it scores (which it sometimes does). So, in a very real way, you're the only one who gets to see the actual me.

Now, a little fun— if you put Malcolm next to me next time, you'll get the reward you're looking for. If you butter the bread the right way, you'll get a double share (somebody has to, as I've arranged). Make sure there's no action over us and you'll win my love forever. And be a sweetheart and make sure the Jeremy group can't stay more than half an hour.

Good luck with your own submissions. I'll put in a good word for you with Steve and that gang. Send me anything.

XO,

Ry

III. Slipped

"Ry we like right now. How far he gets
is not really our decision. The boys
in Boston like him too. There's only
one problem, as we see it, with Ry—
he takes the fagelah stuff too far.
What's that place called, where he
hangs out? Main Line what?
Yeah, too freaky, too cranky, too
faggy. We'll point him in a new
direction, then we'll get back to ya.
Cheers."

Group e-mail, sent from villanova.edu—

"Villanova's Gold Press Reading Series
is proud to present
Ry Mullen and Marshall Jacobs
reading in Foster Lounge
on Friday, September 2, 7: 30 p.m."

(Ry corrects the e-mail in his mind to read "bios unavailable")

Marshall and Ry both got a PEW grant
Marshall never said anything to Ry about it
Marshall didn't appear then to have any extra money
Marshall wouldn't guess what Ry got
Marshall, can we be candid?

IV. What the shrink said

S: So, I'm to understand— you feel fractured about your life, and you don't see any way out in any direction. Correct?

R: (calmly, but with a subtext of anger) That's right. The circumstances of my life are not conducive to anything but ruses and deception. But I want it to be understood (and I'm paying you, so it must be understood)— the hardest part for me is that I can't see myself as sympathetic anymore. I ask those around me for compassion, yet I don't think I deserve it. Main Line Arts Center is a graveyard for fags, and I'm a big fish in a small pond. I have power there, and I abuse it. That's why, about writing and other key issues, I've become a joke to myself.

S: Can you attribute the circumstances of your life to anything you're doing wrong?

R: Yeah— I pander to my own facility for jive-talking bullshit. Why I bother to publish garbage is because I can— I jive-talked my way into it. My position at the Arts Center is another one I jive-talked my way into. And ultimately, as I said, I do it because I can.

S: You feel you can't control this tendency?

R: Very, very difficult. The terms of my upbringing were very stringent— you either talk your way out of deprivation, or you stay deprived. I was raised by evasive people to be evasive. And my father was a salesman and talked for a living. His stance before me was "What've you got to sell me, Ry?"

S: But you don't have to be a salesman now if you don't want to.

R: I suppose I don't. Yet the compulsion to do it is there. That's why I like the Surrealists— they're selling you a very specific version of reality. What I write is what I sell. And no one gets to know where my money comes from.

S: Is that something you want to share?

R: No. But here's what I want to know— if you've reached a point in your life where you can't like yourself, how do you get back on the road to liking yourself again? Where do you even start?

S: That's a tough one. If everything in your life is a compromise away from having the integrity you want to have, that's tough. You can at least give yourself credit for knowing the truth about yourself.

R: Right, right. But you're not gay or bi, so you can't know what that means to someone like me. Queers feel like fuck-ups in the world, because they're made to feel like fuck-ups in the world. The sense of being broken is a deep one.

S: Okay. Fair enough. But you take the issue seriously. You don't evade it.

R: Not enough, not enough. When you look at yourself and there are no answers, and no answers possible, that's how you get trapped in the maze I'm in now. And I cope by trying to be a successful salesman in the world, in any way possible. When I sell, I win.

S: But you don't win. Isn't that the point? The sense of winning is a superficial one.

R: Yeah, yeah. And the word "superficial" hurts, because that's what I've bothered to settle for. People don't like to admit it, but that's what being queer is all about. You don't get deep, you just stay on the surface and make the best of it.

S: But you're here.

R: Yeah, right. And I suppose that means something, but I'm not sure what yet.

S: You have the capacity to self-reflect, right?

R: Yeah. But I lose that capacity on the sales floor.

V. Scrawled

"The face on the clock"

has dimples angled against obsession.
red rivers run through it, red clouds
burst beneath it, i'm standing against
time itself, no balloons but rhythms
aimed against it, then you

i said it then, to you, i
meant for you to understand the way
i feel, deep into winter's dusk, as
matter changes form inconsequently,
desperation dire as drunken dreams

the face on the clock is more green
then it seems.
how so
how so is when i open the window

onto all that faces past the clock
not run askance, or gone behind, our mind—

tick (tick) tick

After Andrew Marvell

Twelve long years, with the length
of all that time squeezed into a
universe that hovers between us,
as I knock back a third Jack and
Coke and you stir your Jameson,
as our eyes meet and I re-read in
my head what I wrote in a journal
twelve years ago: "two-faced,
mannish, and frigid." That's our
universe: words scrawled in the
heat of undecided passion, which
resolved in the submissive caresses
of another. Yet they hover there,
still undecided because I bet you
kept a journal too, and a good
one, and if you didn't well then
our universe isn't much, I don't give
a shit about the coyness that
can't be squeezed without stress,
and I'll find another mistress.

Pigs and Planes

I don't believe in poetry.
It's a slant that wavers
around different patches
of sky, or mud chucked
on slats of a sty. Or it
could be the pig, or the
plane, farmer or pilot,
pork-chop industrialist, air-
traffic controller. The one
thing it isn't is itself.
To say poetry is poetry
is a rank offence, post-
misdemeanor, sub-felony,
the sort of sin credulous
people pray against. Pigs
you can believe in, and sties.
Planes you can believe in, and skies.
I don't believe in poetry.

Red Life

mark rothko
came to me in
a dream and said,
each color chunk is
a way of life,
you must choose.

i'm wearing a red
sweater, that's my choice.
anything not to be
bloodless.

Credits

Argotist Online Poetry— "Equations #26, 27," "The Studio"

Ex-Ex-Lit— "A Match"

Fieralingue— "Pigs and Planes"

Great Works— "To Burce Nauman"

Hinge Online— "On Love"

Ink Pantry— "Starlight"

Lothlorien Poetry Journal— "Live Forever"

Mipoesias— "After Andrew Marvell," "Wittgenstein's Song" (chapbook collection: *Returns*, 2010)

Moria poetry— "After Andrew Marvell"

Otoliths— "Ode on Waves," "The Witches of South Philadelphia," "Wayfaring Angel," "Cabinet," "Equations #37"

P.F.S. Post— "On Exile"

The Seattle Star— "The Ballad of Robert Johnson," "Feast or Famine"

Seven Corners— "Ode On Jazz," "Pigs and Planes"

Synchronized Chaos— "Dominique," "Stoning the Devil"

X-Peri— "Feel," "On the Schuylkill," "To Satan"

In addition to its publication, the Ode On Jazz was read at a Live at the Writers House reading at the Kelly Writers House in Philadelphia on April 5, 2004, as was To Bruce Nauman, and this reading was broadcast on WXPN in Philadelphia.

This version of the Ode On Jazz was also a #5 hit on the Soundclick Podcasts Overall chart in 2020, and a #7 hit on the hearthis.at Other chart for the week beginning February 7, 2016.

Ode On Jazz in this form was used by French DJ Falki Hoz in a techno track called Hipsters, which was featured on his 2017 Scotch EP from Lo-Fi 45 Records; and released as a single on Soundclick, as "Ode On Jazz (3, with Falki Hoz)", it reached #20 on the Soundclick Electronic Overall chart and #4 on the Techno sub-generic. As of November 12, 2021, "Ode On Jazz (3, with Falki Hoz)" had spent eighteen consecutive weeks in the Soundclick Electronic Overall chart.

Feel was featured in the Feel (I saw) remix by Zenboy1955. The Feel (I saw) remix reached #8 on the Soundclick Electronic Overall chart and #1 on the Acid Electronic sub-generic chart.

As of August, 2022, the Feel (I saw) remix has spent a total of eleven weeks occupying the #1 slot on the Soundclick Acid Electronic sub-generic chart.

The Feel (I saw) remix climbed to #7 on the hearthis.at Electronica chart.

On the Schuylkill was used by Briareus in the electronic piece On the Schuylkill, which reached #20 on the Soundclick Electronic Overall chart and #3 on the Ambient Electronic chart.

Adam Fieled is a writer based in Philadelphia. His books include Posit, Opera Bufa, Beams, When You Bit…, Apparition Poems, Cheltenham, The Posit Trilogy, and The Great Recession. He has work in Jacket, Otoliths, PennSound, The Argotist Online, Poetry Salzburg Review, Tears in the Fence, Great Works, X-Peri, P.F.S. Post, Upstairs at Duroc, Monday Journal, fourW, and in the & Now Awards Anthology: The Best Innovative Writing, from Lake Forest College Press. A magna cum laude graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, he also holds an MFA from New England College and an MA from Temple University, where he held the University Fellowship.

cover presents a photographic image of Kendall Jenner treated by Adam Fieled in 2022

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